

Sea of Sorrows

-the Relentless

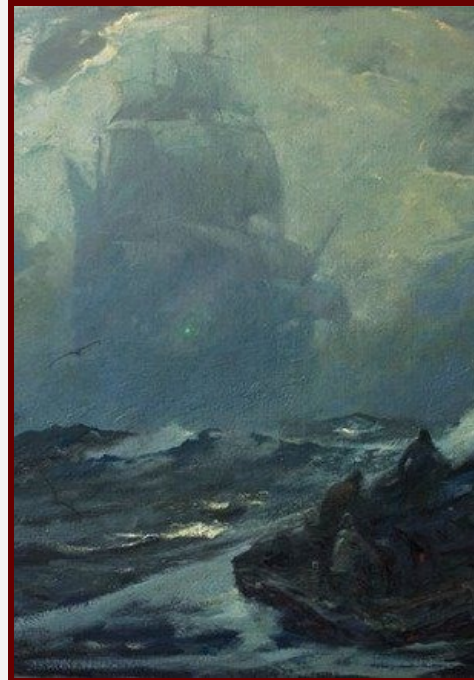
Domain of a Cursed Captain

Darklord: Pietra van Riese

Genres: Nautical Horror and Ghost stories

Hallmarks: Tales of the sea, island domains, cursed voyages.

Mist Talismans: a blood stained sextant, knot of rope from a shipwreck, a dead albatross.



Noteworthy Features.....

- *The Relentless* is the ship of Captain Pietra van Riese, said by sailors to come out of the fog just before a storm. Seeing the ship spells bad fortune and assured doom for a voyage. Worse is the fear that *the Relentless* and her undead crew should attack and take those they capture to Hell.
- The Sea of Sorrows is “just beyond the fog” in a number of other domains. Many ships set sail to chart possible trade routes, many never return. There are also stories of those sailing other bodies of water, such as lakes and rivers finding a sudden fog opening a path to the Sea.
- Voyages across the Sea of Sorrows are difficult for even seasoned sailors. The weather is at the best of times ominous and threatening. Fog banks drift across it like great cloud formations and sometimes take days to sail through. Even more dangerous are the rock formations, jagged reefs and numerous islands which seem to change location each time they are encountered.

Pietra van Riese.....

None can say where Captain Pietra van Riese came from originally. She does not even remember herself. In fact the Captain finds that when she tries to remember her past that she can only remember the legends about her told by other sailors.

Pietra van Riese has known in every port of the Demi-plane of Dread for as long as any can remember. Captain of *the Relentless*, she had no equal on the sea and braved the Mists with a cavalier abandon. Word spread that she and her crew would run any cargo to any port.

Of course these journeys were incredibly dangerous, requiring an iron discipline from the sailors of *the Relentless*. Riese expected nothing less and severely punished any man that shirked his duties. As time went on they started to take advantage of their knowledge of the Mistways.

When a member of the crew overheard details of a particularly valuable cargo they'd tell the Captain. So *the Relentless* would set sail before their target and attack such ships in the Mists. The more piracy Pietra committed, the more ruthless she became and the more she obsessed over her reputation.

Captain Riese ordered her crew to begin taking captives to spread word. Needing only one to survive she would think of creative ways to torment her prisoners. After torturing them for days she would finally have them thrown overboard tied to the ship to be dragged through the water till drowned. These corpses would be left to rot against the hull of the ship. As more were added to this macabre underwater grave it became enough for the bodies to spontaneously animate as zombies. This only pleased Pietra van Riese more.

Finally there came the fateful day when rumors reached the Captain of a passage through the Mists that could take one from the Sea of Sorrows to previously uncharted waters in the Nocturnal Sea. None would risk such a treacherous journey. So it was Pietra van Riese set sail with her crew toward these unknown waters.

Eventually after a couple years passed an Outlander showed up in a port claiming to have sailed with *the Relentless* on her final voyage. The stranger told of the ship navigating moving rocks, reefs populated by horrific monsters, days cutting the ship free from great patches of sargassum. The entire journey was forced ever forward by the heartless cruelty of Pietra van Riese. This continued for months until all resources ran out. So many were lost on the voyage that the ship was left with barely a skeleton crew.

The Outlander spoke with such haunted eyes that none doubted his words. In those last days a pair of ships had found them. Rival Captains with their own motives that wished to bring an end to Pietra. These glory seekers pursued *the Relentless* for days. Finally among a shoal of rocks Captain Riese turned the ship to face her pursuers.

The battle was vicious and short. Pietra van Riese and what remained of her crew never stood a chance. As the broken ship sank the stranger only just managed to struggle into a lifeboat and dropped to the water. As he rowed away from *the Relentless* and the fog became ever thicker he saw a figure. Pietra van Riese looked over the railing with wild glaring eyes and screamed after the fleeing boat... “TELL THEM!”

Pietra van Riese’s Power and Dominion

When she died the Captain of *the Relentless* did not go quietly into that night. Pietra van Riese rose from death as the spectral captain of a ghost ship, crewed by the dead that had died in her service. When Pietra woke she found the sea life and sea water had already been at work. She is missing whole chunks of flesh and an eye. Barnacles, tiny anemones, and strange fronds cling to her. Crabs and shrimp crawl over her rotten flesh and strange phantom fish swim through her corpse. She has stats similar to a **sword wraith commander**.

The Relentless. *The Relentless* rose from the depths and now sails as well as it ever had in spite of the gaping holes and tattered sails. The captives that were hung from the ship's sides still writhe as **zombies** and their moaning can always be heard just before it emerges from a bank of fog. Every part of the ship moves at the will of Captain Riese and it can sail to any body of water in the Demi-plane of Dread with the exception of the waters of Darkon.

Undead Crew. When Pietra and her ship rose from the depths, one by one every member of her crew that had set out on that final voyage rejoined her. They act as an extension of Pietra herself. When she speaks her voice comes from their mouths, what they see or hear she does as well and they only do that which she wills. Aside from being mindless they have stats similar to **sword wraiths**.

Closing the Borders. Pietra's domain is her ship and the waters she sails. When she wishes to close her borders the crew of *the Relentless* start up in a sea shanty from gurgling rotten voices. The constant shroud of fog around her ship thickens in a one mile diameter centered on her and functions as detailed in "The Mists" section of the VGtR.

Pietra's Torment

Pietra would revel in how her legend has grown if not for the following circumstances:

- Pietra van Riese cannot remember any part of her life and finds her undeath difficult to track with her mind spread throughout her crew. Furthermore, tales of her past or present are always inaccurate. Anyone that speaks of her, *the Relentless* or the crew, always remembers events, stories or songs incorrectly.

- At first Pietra thought having her crew function as an extension of herself would be the ultimate boon. But now she has no one to praise her plans, treat her with hero worship or fear her rages. There is no one that crews her ship that can bear witness to her deeds.
- Pietra cannot go ashore or into shallows. Her domain only exists on the water and to her anything on land appears lost in the Mists similar to the edge of domain's belonging to other Darklords.
- Pietra van Riese has still not found the passage she seeks to the Nocturnal Sea. This has become her obsession as the one voyage she failed to complete. She also believes that if she finds the passage that her torments would end, leaving her free.

Roleplaying Pietra

Pietra van Riese is a ruthless Captain driven by her ego. When she encounters others at sea she attempts to sink any vessel they may be using and then take them aboard the Relentless. Once she has a captive audience she spends days tormenting them. Showing off just how cruel and sadistic she can be.

It should be noted that these things don't give her pleasure in themselves. The only joy or pleasure she seems to derive is from how others react to her. It is the fear or awe of others that she seeks. After she has had her fun she will leave a survivor in the water near land or an approaching ship so they may tell the tale.

Personality Trait. "I am Pietra van Riese. As you've probably heard my name, you likely realize you're doomed.

Ideal. "No one will ever forget the name Pietra van Riese."

Bond. "*The Relentless* is the finest ship that has ever sailed."

Flaw. "Nothing matters more than my legend."

Adventures in the Sea of Sorrows.....

The horrors of the Sea of Sorrow are those of dangerous voyages across vast and uncharted distances. It is a vast body of water with gray choppy water covered with banks of fog that drift across its surface like cloud formations. Rain is common, swiftly turning into storms that disappear just as suddenly. Flotillas of sargassum seaweed, shifting rocks and jagged reefs are but a few dangers. Add to this that every manner of sea monster and aquatic nightmare dwells within its waters.

It is best used by a DM wishing to plan a sea voyage in the Demi-plane of Dread or in a campaign where sailing will be the path by which players move between domains. While it can potentially touch any body of water in any domain, there are some places where the Sea is always just beyond the Mists.

The following domains have bodies of water that one can sail from to the Sea of Sorrows and back as long as the borders are open.

Domain	Body of Water
Dementlieu	Sea of Sighs somewhere to the south-west
Kalakeri	Sea of Spears near the Silent Sitars
Lamordia	Sea of Secrets near the Isles of Agony
Mordent	Sea of Storms out beyond Abbey Point
Saragoss	Beyond the Leviathan's Clutches
Souragne	Murky Sea in the fog to the north-west
Valachan	Sea of Shoals south of Kiru Island

In addition to these domains are "the Islands of Terror" which are scattered across the Sea of Sorrows. Among these are Markovia, Ghastria and numerous Pocket Domains belonging to Darklords too minor to have more than small islands for their domains.

These islands will be detailed further in [Part II of the Sea of Sorrows](#).

A note on the Sea

When running adventures across the open sea one of course thinks of storms and crashing waves as potential encounters for players to deal with. I include here a few suggestions for dealing with such events.

Rules wise I suggest using the tables for “Trap Save DCs and Attack Bonuses”, “Damage Severity by Level” and “Spell Equivalent by Level” provided in the DMG and XGtE. These make solid guidelines that can be used for the various dangers of the sea and weather on such a voyage.

Also I suggest something I find very effective for a sense of conflict with nature itself. Much in the way sailors refer to the ocean, I refer to the sea as if it was an entity. Acting with a will of its own, whether for good or ill.

“The Sea throws a wave over the ship forcing everyone to make a Dex save.”

“The Sea is calm today and the current strong, making the crew cheerful.”

“The Sea smashes the ship towards the rocks with a 23.”

“Fishing is good, your nets are filled with the Sea’s bounty.”

“The Sea crashes a wave over the bow dealing 14 damage tearing off the bowsprit.”

“The Sea shifts and your vessel’s sails fill with a favorable wind.”

I ran a naval campaign from 1 to 20 and found this style of narrating the Sea (capital S) to reinforce the idea of it as a force to be respected by the PCs. It made it feel like a constant presence in their character’s lives. The ship’s pilot in particular developed a quasi-romantic relationship with the sea much like many a sailor in song or tale.

A note of Naval rules

Sourcebooks for 5th Edition do not really provide much in the way of rules for naval vessels. So I have taken the time to put something together for my own use which I include here for anyone interested.

For those who really know their naval lore/facts/etc... This is just meant to provide expanded but still simple rules. For example when I talk about the speeds of ships, I know there are records of faster speeds. It is an average that I used based on what consistently popped up on Google, nautical factoid sites and in one case a yacht club's racing website.

Feel free to use whatever numbers you think make more sense. Again. It's a simplified system.

Here is the document for [Naval Rules](#).